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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HAVANA 000005

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SUBJECT: CASTRO ALIVE FOR 48TH ANNIVERSARY OF REGIME

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Classified By: DCM Buddy Williams; Reasons 1.4 (b/d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Cuban media carried a New Years message from Fidel Castro noting the passing of 48 years since he assumed power, and also announcing that he is still on a slow path to recovery from his medical crisis. XXXXXXXXXXXXX
still believes Castro is terminally ill, even if the report from Spanish doctor Jose Luis Garcia Sabrido's visit says he does not have cancer. Cuban media made no mention of the Spanish doctor's visit. A contact close to Castro's sister reports that the sick dictator is not mentally fit to retake control of the government, even if he physically recovers. New Years was otherwise a low-key event in Havana. End Summary.

¶2. (U) The new calendar year is the occasion for the Cuban regime to celebrate one more year of its own ascent to power--January 1, 1959 being the day that Castro's predecessor Fulgencio Batista, fled Cuba into exile. 2007 is officially dubbed "Year 49 of the Revolution," a less thematic name than 2006, which was the "Year of the Energy Revolution." GOC media on December 31 all carried Fidel Castro's New Year's message, which is essentially a pep talk to the country and his own medical status report. It is unknown if he wrote or even edited the text. Highlights are as follows:

-- We've completed a year of great effort and encouraging results in the Battle of Ideas and programs in the Energy Revolution...We were dignified hosts of the Non-Aligned Summit, and continued our tenacious resistance to the empire's blockade and aggression...

-- I thank you all for your affection and support. Regarding my recovery, I have always warned that it would be a prolonged process, but it's far from being a lost battle. I cooperate as a disciplined patient with the dedicated team of doctors that take care of me.

-- I have not stopped keeping abreast of important events and news. I exchange ideas with my closest collaborators whenever it has been necessary on matters of vital importance.

¶3. (C) Postscript to Spanish doctor visit: Dr. Garcia Sabrido's Madrid media interview December 26 provided some new information, although seen through the prism of Cuban popular opinion, is tainted by Garcia Sabrido's close

association with the regime and the Castro family. USINT Human Rights Assistant on December 29 visited Teresita Paz, wife of the late Gustavo Arcos (former GOC official and later a dissident); Teresita is friends with one of Fidel Castro's sisters and has contact with her on a regular basis. Teresita characterized the Spanish doctor's visit to Cuba a "farce," adding that the Castro sister said just a few days ago that Fidel's mind is now completely gone, and he is never going to be able to get back to work." Pro-democracy leader XXXXXXXXXXXXX told P-E Counselor December 28th that the Spanish doctor's visit proved that Cuba is not the medical superpower it makes itself out to be, which was why GOC media refrained from giving the visit any publicity. Independent journalist Miriam Leiva made the same point in an op-ed column on December 29th.

¶4. (C) USINT Health Unit View: USINT's Nurse Practitioner, with experience and training in oncology, has provided the following updated assessment of Fidel Castro's health:

"Based on the photos we've seen, Fidel Castro appears very weakened and cachectic, and it was reported publicly that he lost 20 kilograms in just six weeks from his July 28 emergency abdominal surgery due to hemorrhaging. His October 28 appearance, in a five-minute video, shows him in an over-sized jogging suit and walking two-three steps as if he were a marionette swinging his arms robot-style to somehow show strength. But it was so obviously overstated as to almost be comical.

Although his diagnosis is a "state secret," it appeared and still appears he is terminally ill -- having lost over ten percent of his body weight in such a short time and not being strong enough to walk; plus his last public words over a month ago were mostly nonsensical babble.

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Given the statistical odds of a colon, lung, or prostate malignancy for an erstwhile smoker 80 years of age, I was leaning towards a metastatic colon or otherwise upper abdominal cancer with approximately six months to live from the date of the surgery. But, if the Spanish doctor is to be believed, then Castro may have had a perforated viscus (bowel) with an inflammatory mass and septic peritonitis (bacteria strewn throughout organs). The differential diagnosis includes:

- Perforated peptic ulcer
- Perforated diverticulum
- Necrotic gall bladder
- Mesenteric ischemia (compromised blood flow) of the colon, with necrosis and perforation.

All this points to a very sick individual, whose recovery is made that much more difficult by the weight loss and possible sepsis.

¶5. (C) Comment: Embassy Madrid's report places Garcia Sabrido's medical reputation above his regime sympathies, which leads us to believe that the Cuban medical team treating Castro may be able to keep him alive longer than we originally estimated. Such a medical diagnosis leaves the Raul-Castro-led clique currently in charge for an extended period of limbo, characterized by stresses and strains in the palace and popular expectation that 2007 should be a year of change and economic improvement. It will be nearly impossible for anything good to happen (economy, human rights, international relations) as long as this limbo period keeps running.

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